

This can't be happening to me!

A True Story By: Bill Meeker

Like most baby boomers, I have enjoyed greater financial success than my parents enjoyed. I have two handsome sons and a great career where I'm respected. I have a beautiful home in the suburbs of Sacramento, a great retirement plan, and plenty of time to look forward to my "golden" years for travel and the enjoyment of my family and grandchildren, or so I thought...

In January 2000, I was somewhat dreading my approaching 50th birthday. With my usual good humor I joked that, after all, I was really only 18 years of age with 31 years of "experience". Furthermore, I am of the school of thought that you are only as old as you feel. Anyone who knows me will tell you that I'm fast on my feet. Although I had been diagnosed as an adult onset diabetic in 1991, it was easily controlled with medications and seldom slowed me down. My fear of the computer had been overcome and I was becoming efficient in the use of e-mail and surfing the net. A major promotion was on the horizon. Thus, the beginning of the 21st century brought many positive thoughts of the good times ahead. I thought anything was possible.

Long-term care insurance wasn't part of my financial planning when I first came to work as the Deputy Project Director for the California Partnership for Long-Term Care. I'd worked for the state of California for over 20 years and really hadn't thought much about long-term care. I was only 46 and had plenty of time to think about long-term care insurance.

While at the Partnership, I produced the educational video on long-term care that many of you have seen. As I conducted research in developing the video, and read the statistics on the risks of needing long-term care, I began to think about my 71 year old mother. I encouraged her to consider long-term care insurance while she was healthy. I also talked with friends at my church – those "older" folks who obviously should consider their needs related to long-term care. Although I encouraged others to plan ahead for their long-term care needs, I had not yet thought of preparing for my own long-term care.

Following a presentation in Southern California, a friend asked me if I had long-term care insurance. I had to admit that although I thought it was a very important issue for "older" people, I hadn't really considered it for myself. After much thought, I decided to purchase a Partnership policy for myself. I chose a comprehensive coverage – a policy that covers care in my home, an assisted living facility, or in a nursing home. By purchasing a long-term care policy at the age of 48, I could set a good example for the consumers and agents I met daily through my job. I could demonstrate that I not only believed in the product, but that long-term care insurance could be reasonably priced when bought at a younger age. My Partnership policy contains all the consumer protections that I knew were the best in California. Although I figured I'd probably pay for my policy for at least 30 years, I knew that with built-in inflation protection my

benefits would increase each year so my insurance would provide the coverage I needed as health care costs rose.

Then, on February 29, 2000, the unthinkable happened. I met reality like a drunk driver in a speeding car. I was out of control and headed straight into a brick wall. I was having a heart attack! When my son entered my cardiac intensive care room and saw me attached to a heart pump with tubes and machines all over me, the shocked expression and pity on his face was almost more than I could bare. I hated him seeing me like that. After all, I was the one who had dried *his* tears and changed *his* diapers. Yet, I was helpless and I could not confidently reassure him that everything would be okay this time. It all seemed so unreal. I kept thinking, "This can't be happening to me!"

Despite vigorous treatment and cardiac rehabilitation, my doctor sympathetically told me less than three months later that my heart and health status would not allow me to continue working. The words still echo in my mind: "Severe cardiomyopathy", "congestive heart failure", "cardiac refraction of 25%". The prognosis: my heart, my condition, would not improve. I went home in a state of shock from my doctor appointment. Anxious thoughts ran through my mind. What would I do now? Do I have enough savings? How long will my temporary disability insurance pay last? Will I be able to continue making my house payments? What will my income be? What do I do now? How will I take care of myself as my condition worsens? How can I stay independent? All these thoughts churned in my mind.

My cardiologist has told me that my heart disease is progressive and I will likely need long-term care in the future. Obviously, I am going to be using my long-term care insurance much sooner than I ever expected. I know that with my long-term care insurance, I have the freedom and options to get the help I will need without having to rely on my family and friends. When the time comes, the shock I saw on my son's face won't haunt me because I won't be a burden to him and his brother. They will not have the sole responsibility to take care of me. I will enjoy their company when they visit, knowing I'll be okay financially without losing everything I have. And even if I do use up all my insurance, I know that I can go to Medi-Cal for help to get the long-term care I need and still have something to leave to my grandchildren. Either way, I know my sons will not have to watch helplessly while I slowly lose everything I've worked so hard for through the years. I know I'll be able to leave my assets to my family like I'd planned all along.

Like most people, I did not expect to ever need long-term care, especially at such a young age. I know from my experience working in the Partnership, that, unfortunately, my situation is not uncommon. When I was working at the Partnership, I warned many Californians about the consequences of not planning for their own long-term care needs. I'm convinced what I said back then was the right message and it is still the right message now.

I am already on fourteen different prescriptions. I continue to participate in a monitored cardiac rehabilitation program to help keep my heart as strong as possible. I am starting to have trouble maintaining my home.

I know it is just a matter of time until I will need long-term care. I also know that if I tried to purchase a long-term care policy now, I wouldn't qualify because of my health status. I am so glad I made the right choice and planned for my own long-term care needs. For peace of mind and the love of your family, I hope you have too.

Until recently, Bill P. Meeker was the Deputy Project Director of the California Partnership for Long-Term Care. Mr. Meeker is now retired and living at home in Sacramento.